



POLAR LANCASTERS

Scenes from a Training and Research Flight Into the Arctic Circle by Aircraft of the E.A.N.S.

THE recently completed Gibraltar-Iceland-Arctic Circle cruise by seven Avro Lancasters (Rolls-Royce Merlin engines) of the Empire Air Navigation School, was productive not only of technical data but of some splendid photographs, a selection of which appear here. Furthermore, it served as a reminder that there is plenty of life yet left in a bomber which is already history.

Taking off from their base at Shawbury in spring-like weather, the Lancasters headed for Gibraltar where fuel and bananas were taken aboard. Thence they set out over the Atlantic to the friendly Icelandic capital of Reykjavik. Here Mr. S. Baxter, the British Minister, had arranged a reception for the crews before they left on the final non-stop stage of their flight over the desolate Jan Mayen and Bear Islands, within 900 miles of the North Pole. Temperatures of -25 degrees centigrade were recorded over Bear Island, but the crews are reported to have described their arrival at Shawbury as "the coldest part of the trip."

Comprising students of No. 5 Specialist Navigation Course, the crews totalled forty-two officers and twenty-four senior N.C.O.s. The purposes of the flight were to establish an effective polar navigation drill, using standard Service equipment; to collect information on weather and signals; to investigate any arctic phenomena which might manifest themselves and to acquire experience with long-range radio aids and pressure pattern flying.

By taking continuous advantage of favourable winds, a distance of 2,200 miles, which would normally have occupied 11 hours, was completed in 10½ hours.

Of the seven aircraft engaged on the flight five landed at Kinloss, on their return flight to Shawbury, the other two withdrawing from the last section of the exercise, one at Reykjavik with electrical and radio defects, and the second with an oil leak in one engine. These aircraft proceeded independently and returned safely to Shawbury.

Seething cloud obscures the Arctic ice.



Jan Mayen island, glimpsed through cloud.

Lancasters at Gibraltar, awaiting take-off for the long hop to Reykjavik.

